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COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Twenty-ninth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 753rd MEETING

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 16 January 2002, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Mr. DOEK

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 4) (continued)

Initial report of Greece (CRC/C/28/Add.17; CRC/C/Q/GRE/1; HRI/CORE/1/Add.65/Rev.1; written replies of the Government of Greece to the questions in the list of issues (document without a symbol distributed in the meeting room in English only))

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Greece took places at the Committee table.

2. Ms. BELDEKOU (Greece) said that she was the Secretary-General of Welfare of the Ministry of Health and Welfare, and that her presence as head of delegation showed the importance the Government assigned to the Committee's work. Greek society had always been - and continued to be - child-oriented and sought to improve the lot of its children.

3. The authorities endeavoured to maintain close contacts with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which they hoped would be further strengthened for the purpose of implementing the Convention. She commended the Committee for its excellent work, and said she looked forward to a constructive dialogue.

4. Ms. MANGANARA (Greece) said that although the drafting of the initial report had been a long and complex process, it had been highly rewarding. An ad hoc committee, with representatives of the various ministries, had been formed in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs some years previously. That committee had subsequently drafted the report, using a collaborative approach, in which a number of NGOs dealing with children's issues had been invited to exchange views with committee members and supply data on any issues they wished. A number of people had been mobilized in each ministry to provide information on policies, programmes and laws, explain how they were implemented and supply evaluation data.

5. Ms. SPINELLI (Greece) said that, like all conventions and treaties signed and ratified, the Convention had become part of domestic law upon its ratification in 1992 and could be directly enforced by lawyers and judges in the course of juvenile justice; in cases of conflict the Convention prevailed over domestic law. Children were also protected by other international instruments and by strong national organizations such as the National Committee on Human Rights and the Office of the Ombudsman, which also dealt with child issues. Greece maintained the characteristics of a Gemeinschaft society, with care provided by the extended family. Unwed mothers and single-parent families were a tiny minority; juvenile delinquency was not a serious problem and victimization of children was a new phenomenon.

6. Greeks, coming from a country with a history of emigration, were no strangers to social exclusion, xenophobia and discrimination. Hence they continued their tradition of hospitality and were very welcoming to foreigners, even after the 1990s when Greece had become a host country for migrants and refugees. The Youth Parliament promoted children's participation in

civic and cultural life and afforded them the opportunity to express their views. Its meetings were attended by children not only from Greece itself, but from Cyprus and the wider diaspora, and were accessible to thousands of young people through the media.

7. The country had a special juvenile justice system and its 52 juvenile courts had exclusive jurisdiction over all young offenders aged 7-17. They also tried children aged 17-21 for offences committed before they were 17. The public prosecutor for minors, attached to each court, served the needs of child offenders as well as child victims of abuse. Unfortunately, the probation services in operation in each juvenile court since 1976 were not adequately staffed. Athens, with some one third of the population, had a juvenile police section, and police officers throughout the country received training in juvenile law and the Convention. The age of criminal responsibility was 13, and non-custodial educational measures were ordered for children aged 7-12. In the absence of a family setting, they were placed in child-care centres, foster homes or put up for adoption.

8. The term "minor" used with respect to victims implied children up to age 18, unless the law specified a lower age, mainly to provide harsher punishment for adults victimizing minors below a certain age. A bill was being prepared to change the minimum and maximum ages of children in conflict with the law to bring them fully into line with the Convention. The maximum age would be 18, the age at which children voted in Greece. The bill also provided for a special institution for child victims. A committee, chaired by a Vice-President of the Supreme Court and comprising various legal experts, had been established in 2001 to conduct a comprehensive reform in that area. The welfare and best interests of the child were a primary concern of children's law, with a special provision in that regard contained in the civil law.

9. The most frequent offences were traffic violations, theft and drug offences. However, the Athens Juvenile Court's statistics for miscellaneous offences were inflated owing to cases of children charged with illegal entry or begging. They were subject to the non-custodial measures previously mentioned.

10. The 52 juvenile protection societies had been reorganized in 1995. Supervised by the Ministry of Justice, they provided social and material support to children at risk or in social difficulty. Their budget had recently been increased, although there was no specific budget for the juvenile courts, which constituted part of the wider Greek judicial system. In accordance with the Beijing Rules and other United Nations instruments, custodial sanctions were a last resort, which accounted for the lack of child-detention facilities. The authorities did not adopt a policy of construction, in the belief that the more facilities, the more children would be inside them.

11. Most detainees were children of foreign parents, given their mobility and the lack of a stable family or permanent residence, suggesting that they might not appear for trial. A number of associations provided legal aid where necessary and the Athens Bar Association and the juvenile protection societies trained young lawyers in the Convention.

12. The representatives of the ministries who had participated in the preparation of the initial report would be urged to set up a coordinating body to strengthen the reporting process. In conclusion, various celebrations, with the participation of children, were planned for 2002 in

order to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the ratification of the Convention, in the hope of wider dissemination of its principles and provisions, and a special effort would be made to enact the relevant bills.

13. The CHAIRPERSON invited Committee members to put questions to the delegation relating to general measures of implementation and the definition of the rights of the child.

14. Ms. KARP commended the delegation for its broad range of representatives and the detailed nature of the report and written replies. Some areas, however, were insufficiently covered. For one thing, the absence of a core document had deprived the Committee of a picture of how certain structures operated in Greece. She particularly wished to know why no chapter had been devoted to general measures of implementation, one of the most important features of any national report. The report was rather legalistic and failed to portray the real situation of children and the impact of the Convention on their everyday life.

15. The report contained little self-criticism, as though the drafters were satisfied that all was well. However, there was no external review process to indicate what difficulties were encountered or which fields required further action for proper implementation of the Convention. Despite the delegation's claim that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) had been invited to participate in the reporting process, she understood that some of them had not been invited and that the process had not been a truly cooperative one. How had the authorities selected the NGOs invited? Also, could the delegation comment on the complaint that some NGOs had been denied access to the report because it had not been circulated in Greek?

16. There was no lack of legislation, although some amendment and harmonization were still required; the major problem was implementation. It was stated in the written replies that a new bill was under consideration containing amendments relating to child law, and that it would raise the age of criminal responsibility. What was the content of that bill?

17. It would be interesting to learn whether reference had been made to the Convention in courts of law. Could the State party provide any specific examples of decisions that had been taken in court on the basis of articles of the Convention? There seemed to be some ambiguity about the right of the child to be heard; the matter needed clarification.

18. According to the report, several organizations were involved in implementing the Convention, such as the National Welfare Organization, the Patriotic Institution for Social Care and Welfare and the Institute of Child Health. To the best of her knowledge, there was no specific structure to coordinate the work of those organizations, although the State party had indicated that it was in favour of establishing a permanent coordinating body to strengthen the reporting process and the linkage between sections of the ministries addressing issues relating to children. Did the Government intend to take any concrete steps towards introducing legislation to that effect? She failed to understand why no information had been provided in the initial report about the Office of the Ombudsman; it would be useful to know whether it had a special unit to address questions relating to children, for example, and how complaints were processed. Had any lessons been learned as a result of the work of the Office of the Ombudsman regarding

the implementation of the Convention? Further details would also be welcome on the new law on decentralization of the welfare services, aimed at reorganizing the national system of social care.

19. Ms. CHUTIKUL said she would like to highlight the importance of having a permanent body to monitor and coordinate implementation of the Convention. Further details should be provided about the role of the National Observatory on the Rights of Children, which had been established to monitor and implement the Convention; it was unclear whether that agency played an ad hoc or a permanent role. The Committee needed to be kept informed of all developments in that area. Furthermore, it would be interesting to learn more about the relationship between the bodies working to promote the Convention, and particularly about the relationship between the Government and NGOs. Was the relationship institutionalized, or did it exist on an ad hoc basis? Was there an umbrella organization, for example, acting on behalf of NGOs, which the Government could approach directly?

20. The reporting State should be more specific about its data collection mechanism. It was unclear whether an official body existed on a permanent basis, responsible for collecting and pooling data. The State party should also indicate whether the Convention had been translated into languages other than Greek, so that all children could have access to it in their own language. That was essential if all children were to be aware of their rights. Lastly, she would like to learn more about the national policy and plan of action for children, particularly in terms of implementing the Convention.

21. Ms. AL-THANI said that she had been impressed to learn that in Greece, the Convention prevailed over customary law. Specific examples should be provided of cases where that concept had been applied. On the issue of the budget, the written replies indicated that it was not possible to provide disaggregated data on the proportion of the national budget devoted to children with regard to health care and alternative care: apparently, children treated at primary health care centres and paediatric units also received services from other medical units and laboratories, which made it difficult to calculate the exact expenditure. However, many other countries in a similar position managed to provide adequate data. The Committee required data in percentages of the budget in order to gauge the real situation in the State party. It was particularly significant in the case of Greece as the budgetary allocations for education were lower than the European Union average.

22. Ms. OUEDRAOGO reiterated the concerns voiced by her colleagues about the need for a permanent mechanism to coordinate and monitor the implementation of the Convention. On the issue of the dissemination of the Convention, she commended the Government on the efforts made to raise awareness of the rights of the child. One particularly innovative example was the annual competition "Children Write and Paint about their Rights", whereby children were asked to paint a picture on a theme inspired by the objectives of the Convention; the paintings were then presented in an exhibition, illustrating how children understood their rights. It would be interesting to know whether children belonging to ethnic minorities or refugee children were encouraged to participate in such initiatives. It was important that all children, including those from remote mountain regions or from one of the islands, should be taken into account when information was disseminated about the Convention. It seemed that the steps taken to publicize the initial report had been insufficient. Some NGOs had complained that they had not been able

to receive a copy of the report, which meant that they were unable to provide constructive criticism. It was essential to disseminate the State party's reports, even in remote areas.

23. On the issue of professional training, the State party had mentioned in its written replies that special educational kits, books and audiovisual material were available to professionals whose job involved raising awareness of the rights of the child; special mention had been made of journalists, teachers, parliamentarians and NGOs. Had members of the police force, social workers and health workers also been able to benefit from such materials, to encourage them to incorporate the rights of the child into their daily activities?

24. The reporting State should provide further details about how the Convention was generally perceived in Greece, given the multi-cultural nature of the society. Had the Government witnessed any resistance to the principles embodied in the Convention, and if so, what had the State party done to overcome the problems? Lastly, she would like to know whether there was a structure in place, either at local or national level, for children to express their concerns and views.

25. Ms. TIGERSTEDT-TÄHTELÄ urged the State party to provide a reply to the question in the list of issues requesting data on the amount and proportion of the national budget devoted to children for the years 1999-2001. Under article 4 of the Convention, States parties had to undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognized in the Convention, and were obliged to undertake such measures to the maximum extent of their available resources. The Committee's role was to examine the progress made by the States parties; if it was to carry out its role effectively and be able to draw comparisons in order to gauge progress, it was essential that it should have disaggregated data at its disposal.

26. Ms. EL GUINDI said that, according to the report, minor offenders were free of criminal responsibility for their acts until they reached the age of 12. In her opinion, the age was fixed too low.

27. Mr. AL-SHEDDI expressed concern about the fact that much of the information in the report dated back to before 1995. He felt that the statistics provided about the situation of specific groups of children were insufficient. It would be useful to learn whether there were any centres in Greece responsible for providing up-to-date statistics. He was equally concerned about the fact that the Convention was disseminated to schoolchildren only in the sixth grade. He agreed with Ms. El Guindi that the minimum age of criminal responsibility was too low.

28. Ms. KARP asked whether the National Welfare Organization, which had been established to coordinate welfare services in Greece, was in full operation. She would be interested to know what measures were being taken by the Government to address the shortage of professionals working in the social sector. While she welcomed the fact that a bill was being prepared to bring the minimum age of the criminal responsibility into line with the Convention, the minimum age for compulsory enlistment in the army was 17 years, which was not in line with the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflicts. What were the

Government's views on the aforesaid Optional Protocol? In its written replies, the Government had expressed its intentions to ratify only the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

29. Ms. TIGERSTEDT-TÄHTELÄ asked whether Greece had ratified the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities or the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

The meeting was suspended at 11.10 a.m. and resumed at 11.25 a.m.

30. Ms. MANGANARA (Greece), replying to a question by Ms. Karp, said that several NGOs specializing in the rights of the child within the European Union had expressed interest in the drafting of the initial report and had accepted the State party's invitation to participate actively in the preparation of the report. Their comments had been taken into account.

31. Mr. KASTANAS (Greece) said that a core document had been prepared and was currently being reviewed by the National Committee on Human Rights; it would, without doubt, make a valuable contribution. The document would soon be available to the Committee and other United Nations treaty bodies. Greece had signed the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in 1997, and the competent authorities were in the process of considering its ratification. Greece had not signed the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

32. Ms. ANAPLIOTOU-VAZAIOU (Greece) said that the Government cooperated closely with NGOs in the field of health and welfare, and wished to strengthen ties with the non-governmental sector. Further details could be found on the Government's Web site.

33. Although over half the population of Greece lived in Athens, the Government's main goal at the moment was to decentralize the health and welfare system, so that services could be provided even to those living in the most remote areas. However, it was difficult to attract health and welfare professionals to remote islands and mountain areas. She stressed that all health and welfare services in Greece were provided free of charge, including transport to hospital by aeroplane if necessary. Efforts were being made to integrate minorities into society.

34. As the list of issues had been received in November 2001, the State party had not had sufficient time to prepare the necessary data; she stressed, however, that statistics could be provided, for example on the Health Chart that had been designed to improve and modernize the health and welfare system. The data collection system was well established and not at all ad hoc; however, it was impossible to disaggregate data on the budget allocations for children and adults in the health and welfare sector. Greece was a child-orientated country and health was high on the list of the country's priorities. Legislation in that field was constantly being improved. Compact disks, videos and other materials had been produced to raise awareness of issues related to the Convention in the area of health and welfare.

35. Ms. EVANGELINOU (Greece), in reply to a question about the Office of the Ombudsman, said that it had not been mentioned in the report because it had received only one query, unrelated to the rights of the child. The Ministry of Health and Welfare had sent representatives to the island concerned to solve the problem on the spot.

36. In reply to a question by Ms. Karp, she said the National Welfare Organization had been established in 1947 and was linked to the Patriotic Institution for Social Care and Welfare and other welfare structures. A major reform of the welfare sector was being prepared, to secure equal availability of services in 17 districts nationwide. On the issue of refugee children, a distinction was made between accompanied and unaccompanied children. Accompanied children were not separated from their families and unaccompanied children were directed to special centres. They were encouraged to attend local schools and were provided, inter alia, with psychological support and language teaching. The work carried out in that field by NGOs and medical professionals, and particularly the Red Cross, was much appreciated. Three hundred specialists, such as social workers and psychologists, were to be appointed throughout Greece to help vulnerable children.

37. Ms. TIGERSTEDT-TÄHTELÄ asked whether the 17 regions were governed by elected bodies, whether they could levy taxes and make their own budget, whether they received funding from the national budget, what other mandate they had apart from social welfare and whether they were involved in public health and education, in particular with regard to children.

38. Ms. ANAPLIOTOU-VAZAIOU (Greece) said that the 17 administrative regions had been created for geographic reasons. They did not have the right to levy taxes. Each region had a health care agency. Health care was free of charge for persons not eligible for social security. Decentralization ensured better access to health care and welfare services for the population.

39. The CHAIRPERSON said that there appeared to be a problem with staffing at regional level, because the 300 specialists had yet to be recruited. One difficulty might be in finding persons willing to work on a remote island.

40. Ms. ANAPLIOTOU-VAZAIOU (Greece) said that it was not possible to force specialists to go to remote areas, where the needs were greatest, if they did not want to work there. But they could be asked to work on a remote island of the same region for up to six months; financial incentives were granted in such cases.

41. Ms. KARP enquired whether welfare services had also been decentralized. As she understood it, the 300 specialists to be appointed were to be sent not only to rural areas, but also to Athens and other cities. Would it be possible to hire more than 300 persons if necessary?

42. Ms. ANAPLIOTOU-VAZAIOU (Greece) said that decentralization of welfare services was being prepared with the help of the World Health Organization.

43. Ms. SPINELLI (Greece) said that initially, Greek universities had had no departments of psychology or social work, and only two cities had had universities at all. Recent policy had been to disperse institutes of higher learning, and now a number of islands had their own

universities. Psychology departments had been started, and Greece produced its own child psychologists. Thus, the dispersion of universities had been useful for training local specialists.

44. Ms. ANAPLIOTOU-VAZAIOU (Greece) explained that the medical schools of six universities provided health care services at regional level. University professors who had full posts were not permitted to transfer to another region of Greece.

45. Ms. ANTHOPOULOU (Greece) noted that the National Observatory on the Rights of Children had been established by decree 2001/2909, article 4, as a public agency within the General Secretariat for Youth and the Ministry of Education to monitor implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. That task would be carried out with the help of a documentation centre, cooperation with international organizations and NGOs, public awareness campaigns, action on school curricula, the publication of a guide for civil servants and the preparation of an annual report and action plan on the implementation of the Convention. The Observatory had not yet begun functioning, but it was expected to do so soon.

46. Concerning dissemination of the content of the Convention, she said that the General Secretariat for Youth had collaborated with the Institute of Child Health in publishing two important documents, one entitled "A Policy for the Child in the 21st Century", published in 2000, and the other a manual on the rights of the child, published in 1999. School campaigns were also under way to promote tolerant attitudes and understanding for cultural diversity. The Convention was reprinted in the civic education text for the sixth grade of primary school. A United Nations videotape on the Convention was available for use in the third year of secondary school. Chapters and units on sexual, racial and ethnic stereotypes and the dynamics of prejudice were taught in civic education classes in the third year of secondary school. Primary and secondary school teachers received in-service training in multicultural education, children's rights being a central theme.

47. UNICEF distributed an educational package in Greek schools; the United Nations produced a kit with videotapes and books and organized campaigns on refugees and awareness of cultural diversity. National and international days to promote the rights of the child and human rights and to combat racism were taken up in schools, and a text on each subject was produced by a high-ranking administrator and read out for discussion in the classroom. The Convention had not been translated into languages other than Greek, but pamphlets produced in the languages of Greece's main ethnic groups provided information on children's rights, access to health care and other services, the Greek way of life and government structures. All pamphlets and other educational material were distributed in schools in rural areas. Children in remote areas and children from poor families received free food and accommodation in youth hostels if there was no school near their home. Transport was available free of charge to children who lived at a distance from school. Remote areas had priority for the distribution of Internet and multimedia equipment. Educational television, run by the Ministry of Education, broadcasts programmes on issues related to human rights, multicultural education, the disabled and the environment.

48. Ms. TIGERSTEDT-TÄHTELÄ asked whether any educational material had been translated into the Roma language.

49. Ms. ANTHOPOULOU (Greece) replied that that was not the case. The main problem with the Roma was that they did not want to attend school and probably were not aware of how they could benefit from education. Programmes therefore aimed at reducing the Roma drop-out rate. In 1997, the Roma drop-out rate had stood at 75 per cent; by February 2000, it had been reduced to 26 per cent. Those out of school probably could not read Roma or any other language. Counsellors worked with the Roma, informing adults and children about their rights and explaining how they could benefit from administrative services. A number of activities were conducted involving music and dance in an effort built upon Roma cultural affinities.

50. Ms. TIGERSTEDT-TÄHTELÄ asked whether any Roma NGOs had contributed their comments to the preparation of the country report.

51. Ms. BELDEKOU (Greece) said that they had not, because there was a platform of NGOs specialized in children's rights which had been following the issues in the European Union context and which had been very interested in participating in producing the Greek report. It was to be hoped that in the future a Roma organization could also be involved.

52. Ms. KARP asked how teachers were taught about multicultural issues.

53. Ms. ANTHOPOULOU (Greece) said that in recent years, considerable efforts had been made with in-service training on multicultural issues. Student teachers also received such training. Indeed, multicultural education had become an important issue in Greek schools. Much educational material had been produced that was tailored to the special needs of different groups. Books were available in a number of languages for subjects in which pupils of foreign origin had difficulty keeping up. Greek as a second language was taught in parallel classes during school hours to enable foreign pupils to remain in regular classes. Educational material was geared to their special needs and teachers were trained accordingly. It was also possible to ask a second teacher who spoke the mother tongue of the majority of the foreign pupils to work together with the regular classroom teacher. Roma children were entitled to a transit card which monitored their progress when they moved from school to school and also served for enrolment and attendance purposes. All children were enrolled in Greek schools, regardless of whether their parents were legal residents. There were also schools for the Muslim minorities, as well as private schools, mainly for American, Australian or European children. Emphasis was placed on a multicultural curriculum for all children so as to promote an awareness of cultural differences.

54. Ms. LAMBROPOULOU (Greece) noted that the Convention was required reading at teaching academies. At her institute, the new curriculum nearing completion would be based on a philosophy of accepting all pupils, irrespective of whether they had special needs or different linguistic or cultural backgrounds.

55. A total of 56 centres were being set up throughout the country to assist families of children with disabilities. The centres were to be staffed with social workers, psychologists, speech therapists and other specialists.

56. Ms. TZOVOLOU (Greece) reported that police academies held ongoing training courses on modern methods for the prosecution of drug trafficking, sale of pornography on the Internet and other offences, in particular when minors were involved.

57. Ms. SPINELLI (Greece), referring to implementation of article 1 of the Convention, said that a committee had been established in June 2001 to discuss whether the age of criminal responsibility should continue to be set at 12, but had not made any recommendation yet. That issue posed a dilemma: there was a need to raise the age of criminal responsibility, but prosecutors and judges in juvenile courts had pointed to the maturity of children who were committing more and more serious offences at an earlier age. The juvenile courts had jurisdiction for felony cases, and that created a considerable problem for prosecutors and judges.

58. In connection with a question on the implementation of the Convention in domestic law, she said that juvenile courts usually imposed non-custodial sentences, and such decisions were not published. She was thus unable to cite any case-law. But as the Convention was directly enforced by the courts, lawyers had an interest in referring to it.

59. Greece had only recently experienced the transition to a multicultural society. It would take time to respond adequately to a series of fresh challenges and problems. Her Government had become aware that many Roma families were unable to benefit from child allowances because they rarely registered their children at birth. Consequently, support was being provided for Roma families with a view to enhancing their understanding of registration procedures.

60. In response to allegations that the Convention was unavailable in Greek, she drew attention to the existence of an official translation, published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

61. THE CHAIRPERSON said that the problem was not that a translation did not exist, but that NGOs were having difficulty gaining access to the translated version.

62. Ms. SPINELLI (Greece) said that the translation of the Convention was freely available to anyone who requested a copy. Dissemination was encouraged by steps such as the inclusion of the Convention in programmes of study at the Law School of the University of Athens. She acknowledged that the Web site of the Ministry of Justice required further work before the Convention could be consulted in Greek on the Internet.

63. The National Observatory on the Rights of Children was a public agency responsible for collecting data and monitoring implementation of the Convention. Statistics were currently compiled separately by the juvenile courts, by the Juvenile Division of the national police and by other services active in the field, but a single body responsible for the compilation and dissemination of statistics had yet to be created.

64. Greece was involved in a number of European Union action plans concerning, inter alia, drug prevention, organized crime, sexual exploitation of children and pornography on the Internet. As a member of the Council of Europe, it had also signed the Convention on Cybercrime, which contained provisions on pornography on the Internet.

65. The CHAIRPERSON invited the members of the Committee to ask questions concerning general principles, civil rights and freedoms and family environment and alternative care.

66. Ms. KARP said she understood that, although the National Observatory on the Rights of Children had been provided for by law, it had yet to begin to function fully. She asked for

clarification of its current status. It was encouraging to hear that the Government was committed to developing a good relationship with NGOs, but the use of Internet in improving communication was only a partial solution. In her view, State authorities needed to work together with NGOs, which implied direct human contact as well as communication at distance. While there were a number of action plans dealing with various aspects of the Convention, the Convention was a comprehensive document which required a correspondingly comprehensive approach to implementation. There could be no substitute for a single, integrated plan of action for that purpose.

67. Referring to the delegation's comments concerning the transition to a multicultural society, she said she continued to receive reports of xenophobia in everyday life. While she welcomed the emphasis on education in schools, she asked what steps the Government was taking to educate the public at large about the importance of peaceful relations between communities. So far it appeared that the change in the composition of Greek society had yet to be matched by a corresponding change in attitudes. In particular, she expressed concern over the problems experienced by the Roma population, which included police brutality, eviction, a high illiteracy rate and a failure to benefit from social security. Greater efforts to hold consultations with the Roma community would make it easier to resolve their problems and would help create the environment necessary for their empowerment.

68. She expressed concern at the high number of juveniles committing traffic-related offences, and asked whether there were any plans to establish a committee to investigate the phenomenon. There appeared to be gaps in the statistical information provided in the written replies concerning the victimization of minors, indicating a need to improve overall knowledge of that issue. In particular, it was difficult to assess criminal offences against children in view of the vague categories of acts used in the presentation of the statistics. She failed to understand the difference, for instance, between the provocation of scandal by lecherous acts, insult of sexual dignity, abuse of minors to lechery and abuse to lechery. With regard to prostitution, she understood that only girls benefited from specific protection, despite the fact that many boys were victims of sexual offences. She would appreciate an explanation of how child victims were protected during legal proceedings to ensure that they did not suffer unnecessarily.

69. Mr. AL-SHEDDI asked why there seemed to be no specific legislation to prevent discrimination in all settings. With reference to article 7 of the Convention, he asked whether the delegation could respond to allegations that families from some minority groups had been restricted in choosing a name for their child. He inquired whether legislation existed to protect the right to choose names freely. In the developing context of a multicultural society, how had rules been adapted to provide for the possibility of granting citizenship to immigrants? He would welcome further details of why some Roma families had been unable to seek child benefits owing to their failure to register children at birth.

70. Ms. CHUTIKUL asked how seriously the Government took recommendations made by the children's parliament, and whether the delegation could give examples of legislation adopted in response to the views expressed by child representatives. She would be interested to hear about how children were able to participate in the running of schools, particularly with regard to discipline. Even though corporal punishment had been prohibited in schools, it remained

prevalent as a form of chastisement in the home. She asked for an account of what the Government was doing to improve parents' awareness of alternative methods of discipline.

71. Ms. AL-THANI asked whether the opinion of the child was taken into account when the decision was taken to place a child in an institution to offer protection from an abusive family. What follow-up measures were taken to ensure that the decision was in the best interests of the child? She understood that some sections of the population were subject to Islamic law, according to which young children stayed with their mother in the event of a separation, whereas adolescents remained with their father. It was important that such rules should be applied flexibly, giving consideration to the preference expressed by the child.

72. She would be interested to learn whether any campaigns had been carried out to raise awareness of the danger to children of the availability of harmful material on the Internet. She welcomed the useful studies carried out over an extended period to investigate cases of neglect and physical abuse. However, no in-depth study had been carried out to reach a better understanding of sexual abuse. She asked for details of the procedure to follow if children wished to report abuse, as well as the steps that the Government had taken to provide for children's rehabilitation.

73. Ms. OUEDRAOGO expressed concern over the freedom with which women could choose to have an abortion up to the twelfth week of pregnancy, and over the high number of illegal abortions. She inquired about steps being taken to promote contraception.

74. She asked whether Greece had considered signing the United Nations Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. In view of increasing evidence of intolerance towards foreigners, what was being done to raise awareness of the need to eliminate xenophobia?

75. The CHAIRPERSON asked, with reference to paragraph 64 of the report, what was meant by the phrase "the child has a legal interest". He asked the delegation to clarify whether a child had the right to discover the identity of its natural father when a sperm donor had been used for the purposes of artificial insemination. He would appreciate an explanation of whether children aged over 16 years enjoyed freedom of association, particularly the right to join political parties, trade unions or religious groups. According to paragraph 89 of the report, the right to privacy pursuant to article 16 of the Convention could not be exercised by children themselves, but by the person or institution with custody of a child. He asked whether that implied that the correspondence of a child in an institution could be opened by the person in charge of that institution, without the child being informed. He would like to know whether the figure of 600 adoptions per year, given in paragraph 157 of the report, included intercountry adoptions. With regard to efforts to combat child abuse, it appeared that most activities were taking place in Athens.

76. Ms. TIGERSTEDT-TÄHTELÄ said she would be interested to hear the views of the delegation on mainstreaming the child perspective.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.